

CITY OF ROCHESTER

Impact of Monroe County's Proposed Budget Cuts

Submitted to the Community
by
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Between 1995 and 2001, an increasingly robust state economy, with overall trends of rising sales tax revenues and less dramatic social service spending, helped improve the financial picture of New York's counties, even in the face of escalating state mandated costs.

During this period, Monroe County's posture of "tax stability" made the County budget more reliant on sales and other consumption taxes, and thus even more susceptible to economic conditions. When the national, state, and local economies slowed in 2002, the gains of the previous years evaporated.

On August 2, 2002 County Executive Jack Doyle presented preliminary budget proposals for fiscal year 2003 containing draconian program cuts. On October 8, 2002, he presented his formal budget proposal to the County Legislature. Some of the cuts announced in August appear to have been withdrawn. Some critical details remain to be determined (e.g., existence and magnitude of cuts directed to specific services and vendors).

County budget decisions have an immediate and direct impact on individuals, businesses, institutions, and other local governments, as well as our landscape and public health. In other words, County budget decisions have a direct and immediate impact on the quality of life in Monroe County. The decision-making is now the purview of the County Legislature.

In the American public policy process, one can be an impartial observer -- choosing to do nothing and accepting whatever is decided. Or one can be an advocate -- studying an issue and taking a stand. Given the magnitude of the impact of potential County budget cuts, I feel compelled to add my voice to those of others in the community that advocate for more rational, humane, and far-sighted County budget decisions. It is my hope that the County Legislature will listen to these voices.

A Few Notes on "Tax Stability"

The County Executive's October 8th press release proudly heralds that the proposed 2003 budget, "... does not include a County property tax increase ... the 11th straight year of stable property taxes." That is an interesting claim. Absent a review of what the community may have had to forego in terms of public services not received due to these limited revenues, one could reasonably argue that it means little. But even momentarily suspending that important *caveat*, the claim needs further scrutiny.

First, the period in question goes back to 1993 and encompasses budgets that increased the Monroe County real property tax levy by \$850,000 ... \$2,130,150 ...and \$1,075,000 compared to those of the preceding year. To be sure, there were decreases in the levy as well during that period, and the proposed 2003 levy is less than what it was in 1992. But the claim does call into question what "stability" means to the County.

Perhaps what is being measured is the Full Value Tax Rate, and the data there are more consistent with the claim, i.e., a decrease in the rate in all but one of the years (the 2001 rate is \$0.04 higher than the 2000 rate). But that, of course, must be viewed in light of property values. The equalized assessed values of real property (or Full Value) increased year-to-year in all but two of the eleven years. Overall, the Full Value of real property **increased by more than \$7 Billion during the period!** Claiming credit for achieving “property tax stability” in such an environment is, in truth, not that significant an accomplishment.

Secondly, if a burden is passed along down the municipal food chain, is “stability” real or illusory? For example, the County is proposing to eliminate \$550,000 in aid that has been used to support the Rochester Police Department. Given that the City is under a legal obligation to maintain the number of police officers on its police force (and never mind for the moment the need for police officers !), the typical City homeowner would need to pay about an additional \$5.00 per year in property taxes. How is “stability” thus achieved? How will it be achieved when the towns are required to make up for dramatic cuts in road maintenance support? The *County’s* record may be preserved, but *real* stability - that which would benefit the entire community - will not be achieved.

Clearly, the passing along of tax burdens to other municipalities can be truncated if all agree that the expenditures underwritten by the tax revenues were never meritorious. If that is the case, the County budget should be rightly applauded. But that returns us to the temporarily suspended *caveat*: In public finance, taxes (all revenues, in general) do not stand alone. They have no meaning absent the other side of the budget - the expenditures, the public goods and services. Taxes buy public goods and services ! things that benefit this community and that are beyond the reach of individuals to provide for themselves.

Public finance and partisan politics sometimes mix poorly. Elected officials never relish the prospect of a tax increase. Sadly, every action taken in support of one is fodder for a future opponent’s election campaign rhetoric and typically brought out long after the meaningful context has been forgotten. But there are times when doing what is necessary as an elected official needs to supersede doing what is necessary to remain an elected official. This community seems to understand that. Just about every news report of the plans of the towns, villages, and school districts of Monroe County indicate the possibility, if not the likelihood, of a property tax increase: Irondequoit, 4.8%; Penfield, 17%; Brockport, 19.3%; Sweden, 6%; Rush-Henrietta School District, 7.9%. According to Mr. Doyle’s August 2nd press release, other counties in New York seem to understand also: Ontario County, 21%; Broome County, 33%; Oswego County, 40%; Ulster County, 50%.

The point is not that we should emulate others to specific any degree or magnitude - anyone would shudder at tax increases of 20, 30, 40 or 50% - but that we should give full consideration to a reasonably proportioned tax increase that would permit us to preserve a large number of very valuable services. The imagery of “tax stability” is demonstrably

discredited. We should particularly not cling to that principle if the cost will be excessive. The cuts proposed in the 2003 Monroe County budget yield a cost too high to bear.

Little Analysis, Less Vision

I suspect that Mr. Doyle has not read every page of his massive 2003 budget proposal. (And let me hasten to say that he should not engage in that level of detail.) I do wonder, however, if he has considered the contradictions and ironies of the front-of-the-book presentations of the County's Vision, Mission, Values, and Key Results Areas and the specific budget proposals that follow in the balance of the document.¹ The Vision, etc. statements are admirable:

The vision: Monroe County is a community of choice that is economically prosperous, healthy, safe and fun.

The mission: Monroe County Government will assure a safe, healthy, prosperous and stimulating environment, which results in a world-class place to live, work and enjoy life.

Values include Integrity (We are fair, honest and trustworthy.); Respect for Others (We promote mutual respect that values teamwork, open communication, dignity of the individual.); and Responsibility (We are responsible for our actions and accountable for the results.).

Key Results Areas include Quality of Life: We provide services to our customers that are valued and delivered in a timely fashion and address quality of life issues such as:

- Safe, secure neighborhoods;*
- An environment that promotes a healthy lifestyle;*
- A wide range of recreational and cultural activities;*
- Affordable housing;*
- ... superior health care and human services systems;*
- A wide variety of educational opportunities;*
- ...quality infrastructure.*

Further, who can fail to be impressed by the recently unveiled regional marketing campaign and by its catchy slogan, "Made For Living." The campaign's sophisticated broadcast and print advertisements help inform others of that which we already know - that Rochester and Monroe County are superior places to live, work, and do business.

Simply put, Mr. Doyle's proposed budget undermines these statements and the marketing campaign. The proposed budget reveals a worrisome lack of both responsible cost/benefit analysis and an overall vision of the County's potential.

Short-sighted and inefficient choices appear throughout the proposed budget, such as the proposed cut of \$130,000 for prenatal services for pregnant women. Research indicates that one low birth weight baby can cost this community approximately \$250,000.² Therefore, the cost of two low birth weight babies could easily exceed all projected savings from a reduction in this service

Often the lack of cost/benefit analysis is combined with erroneous images and divisive rhetoric. For example, Mr. Doyle intimates that services provided to low-income city residents and children ("problem people", to quote Mr. Doyle³) make up the bulk of Medicaid spending. However, analysis shows that even though low-income children represent 47% of the Medicaid population, they account for only 13% of Medicaid expenses. Low-income adults and children represent 68% of the population served by Medicaid, but only 28% of Medicaid expenses. On the other hand, elderly, blind, and disabled individuals comprise just 32% of the population served by Medicaid, but account for 72% of overall Medicaid spending.⁴

The County budget document attempts to scandalize readers by stating that the average Monroe County property taxpayer spends \$1.24 per day to support thousands of people on Medicaid.⁵ Rather than mobilizing citizens to compassion for the thousands of their neighbors without private health insurance, Mr. Doyle calls on us to resent the expense. There is no consideration that it is better for all of us to be among healthy people in our homes, schools, and places of work. There is no consideration that Medicaid is a public responsibility because of private sector failures.

These examples are representative of the lack of hard analysis and the overabundance of hard rhetoric emanating from the Doyle administration. All ignore the fact that Monroe County is mandated to provide these benefits, regardless of who receives them. Moreover, reduced support for these programs may save the County money in the short-term, but will do nothing to affect long-term expenditures.

The lack of cost/benefit analysis and the gratuitous rhetoric mask a fundamental lack of vision about the potential of Monroe County. Many of Mr. Doyle's proposed cuts will negatively affect the entire community's quality of life and threaten to unravel cooperative arrangements that have worked successfully for many years. An example is the elimination of the county's contribution to Downtown Public Safety. Rochester's Center City is a major asset of this region. The underlying rationale for County support of police services -- that the Center City is significantly populated during business and recreational hours by residents of Monroe County towns and villages and not just by City residents -- remains as viable as ever.

When it comes to the proposed budget, "penny pinching" has been Mr. Doyle's biggest selling point. Parks, arts, libraries, social services, infrastructure, and intermunicipal agreements are viewed as frills, as charities, something nice perhaps, but certainly not necessary. The "Made For Living" campaign directly contradicts this view. The vision of

the Proposed 2003 budget bodes poorly for the viability of the marketing campaign, which was undertaken in recognition that this County will have to struggle to remain competitive for the foreseeable future. The message in this proposed budget is that the area's largest single largest single governmental entity is virtually giving up on the community.

Certain areas of the budget deserve particular attention.

Rolling the Dice on Reorganization

Mr. Doyle's proposed budget books savings of \$30 million by reorganizing the Departments of Social Services and Mental Health and the Youth Bureau. The savings are outlined in a report by Altreya Consulting.⁶

In essence, the County budget is being balanced by reductions to the Family Assistance and Safety Net programs. Altreya and Mr. Doyle estimate a 46% reduction in the Family Assistance caseload, with the average monthly caseload dropping from 6550 to 3550. Approximately 73% of these cases -- nearly 13,000 in 2002 -- provide support for children.

Despite stating that these caseloads will be shifted to the Safety Net Assistance Program, Altreya and Mr. Doyle also estimate an 11% reduction in the Safety Net Assistance caseload with the average monthly caseload dropping from 5,500 to 4,900.

The reduction of unnecessary paperwork is touted as a key to the success of the savings plan, but, as reported by Jim Goodman in the September 30, 2002, **Democrat and Chronicle**, this demands the commensurate investment of millions in computer technology. Yet, Deputy County Executive Richard Mackey has stated that no additional money will be budgeted for computers.

It is also difficult to see how the reductions can be attained with fewer workers than Altreya recommended. After the initial Altreya report was completed, the County inexplicably decided to further reduce the workforce in the affected departments to save another \$8 million.

In essence, the cost savings of the proposed reorganization appear to be generated through a questionable attempt to discourage people in need from getting assistance. Published reports note that the County's welfare caseload has already been cut in half since 1995, and any assertion of significant numbers of ineligible recipients is untenable.⁷

It is critical to note that the "savings" proposed by Altreya and Mr. Doyle are in activities that are reimbursed at rates of 50-75% from the federal and state governments. The community is being asked to give up that significant outside investment in local services. The County is expected to fully implement the report's recommendations in less than six month's time, nearly as long as Altreya took to prepare the report. Usually, changes of this scale are introduced gradually, in phases, to make sure they work as designed.

Usually, there are initial transition costs, with full savings coming after a period of time. The Altreya report identifies savings ranging from \$10 to \$19 million. The county assumes savings of \$19 million in the first year, or, in other words, immediate and maximum efficiency.

Why should the community have faith in the recommendations of the Altreya report or the County's ability to implement them? As Jim Goodman reports, the person charged with the massive reorganization, Marcia Rocco, responded to that by saying, "That's the unanswered question. How to get there."⁸ The County has many capable administrators, and Ms. Rocco is doubtless one of them, but can Monroe County and its social service clients afford to have such a critical question so ambiguously addressed so late in the game?

An even larger question is, Why should the community gamble on reducing prevention programs that receive outside funding, risking a much higher, non-reimbursed payment for crisis intervention in the future?

Other Human and Social Service Issues

A review of the impending cuts proposed by County Executive Doyle presents many concerns for the community.⁹

Programs to be eliminated in 2003 include: Lifeline; the nationally-recognized Foster Care Pediatric Clinic which serves 1,200 foster children annually; Baby Love; Medical Motor Service's Project Connect; Elder Services Hotline; Provider Resource Network; Prevention Partners substance abuse programs which steer children away from drugs; and Rape Crisis services.

Programs to be reduced include clinical and prevention services for sexually transmitted diseases; the *Not Me, Not Now* youth pregnancy prevention program; senior nutrition centers; nursing services for the flu clinic; the *Gotta Quit* program to stop youth smoking which was funded from proceeds of the tobacco settlement; and elder abuse and shaken baby programs.

Information provided by social service agencies to the Center for Governmental Research (CGR) shows that, on average, 31% of the clients for each agency will immediately lose services, and 43% of the clients in each program will receive reduced services.¹⁰ The reduction in services will grow even greater in 2003, when an average 61% of clients will lose services and 73% will see a reduction in services. These cuts and reductions threaten to derail the stability and progress of many individuals and families receiving support from the affected agencies.

The CGR report estimates that every county dollar that is cut results in an average loss of \$1.55 in matching funds. For example, the county's reduction of \$485,730 for a Hillside

Children Center's contract will net the county's budget only \$170,006 in savings. However, the community will lose \$315,724 in resources that had been leveraged with the county's support. Action for a Better Community was to have received \$51,250 from the county, allowing it to leverage an additional \$153,750 in state funds. The Urban League of Rochester's Counseling and Employment programs were to have received \$87,151 in county funds, causing it to lose an additional \$220,422 in state funds. These are only a few examples.¹¹

Mr. Doyle's proposed cuts to social service agencies total approximately \$6.8 million. However, the loss to the community's coffers jumps to more than \$17 million when anticipated matching funds are added.

A key aspect of the human services infrastructure is the ability of agencies to receive matching funds from public and private sources. For this reason, the County, over the years, "outsourced" many social services by contracting with various agencies. The County entered into such contracts because they were the most cost-effective, long-term way of satisfying its legally-mandated social service obligations. When the County's erstwhile partners react to cuts that will imperil their clients, the County Executive responds harshly and negatively. Rather than engage his partners in constructive dialogue, Mr. Doyle demeans and polarizes: "These agencies, many of them are thankless. They don't care what you've done for them in the past years, they only want to know - - give us the money - -- make sure the money is there for us. And that's the way they think."¹²

Many of these contracted services are preventative. They reduce the overall costs to the system by obviating the need for expensive emergency and crisis-intervention services. One agency responding to the CGR study, for example, noted that the cost of incarcerating a single person for one year could cost as much as \$85,000. Mr. Doyle's proposed budget eschews such cost/benefit analysis and ignores these real cost structures

The social problems that are likely to increase as a result of Mr. Doyle's budget are staggering. The impact on the foster care system, for example, will have direct implications for County government and taxpayers throughout this community. Agencies have expressed concern that more children will be admitted to foster care as a result of a

reduction of services to families in need, and that these children, in turn, will face a diminished foster care system.

In addition to the needs of this population, cuts or service reductions for teen and high-risk pregnant women, individuals with mental illness, teens in the juvenile delinquency system, adults in the criminal justice system, and youth development will lead to higher long-term costs for Medicaid, public assistance, and public safety.

The proposed cuts come at a time when the local economy is shedding jobs. In July,

2002, there were 11% more recipients of food stamps in Monroe County than in July, 2001. The proposed cuts will likely exacerbate an already difficult situation for the poor, and result in more homelessness and unemployment, more mental health emergencies, put our seniors in jeopardy, and increase the burden on public health. Truly, these budget cuts represent a threat to the quality of life and pocketbooks of all Monroe County residents.

This community has worked long and hard to set up a human services infrastructure that responds to the myriad needs of our diverse populations and ameliorates human service demands on government. In past years, for example, the City has participated in several collaborative efforts with the County, United Way, Rochester Area Community Foundation, and others. These efforts helped align standards for the programming, reporting, and development of community-wide outcomes and performance measurements for service providers. They have helped institutionalize attainment of these outcomes and standards. These and future efforts are sure to be negatively affected as agencies are forced to reduce services to our most vulnerable citizens.

Impact on Library

Mr. Doyle proposes a 17.5% (\$1.3 million) cut in funding for central library services. The cut to the Library budget is all the more significant since the Library was already two months into its 2002/03 fiscal year when it was announced. The original budget assumed Mr. Doyle would propose \$7.4 million for the Library for the third straight year. The assumption of flat funding was made after Mr. Doyle failed to adhere to his contractual obligation to communicate to the City the County's proposed level of funding for the Library by April 15.

While not as dramatic as the proposed double-digit percentage cut, the three years of flat funding had its own quietly insidious impacts, including program and staffing reductions of \$243,400 in 2001-02 and \$458,900 in 2002-03.¹³ These could not be achieved by harvesting efficiencies or "cutting fat." The 2002-03 cuts required by "merely" a continuation of flat County funding included the elimination of 22 positions, a 5% cut in the book budget, and the elimination of "hold harmless" grants to member libraries. Mending workshops for member libraries were also eliminated, as was publication of the popular Human Services Directory and Neighborhood Associations Directory. Public computer training was curtailed, as was staff training. The Library also tapped into its endowment to avoid further reductions in its materials budget.

When Mr. Doyle finally notified the library that its 2002-03 budget was not to be held flat but rather cut by to be cut by \$1.3 million, the job cuts jumped to 28 positions, resulting in devastating cuts in services. Service hours provided by the central library's Children's Center and Local History Department were cut. Service to the homebound were eliminated, as was the "Rochester Images" digitization program. One of the entrances to the central library was closed. Maintenance and security were curtailed. The book budget was slashed by another \$75,000. The Graphic Arts Department was eliminated.

Children's consultant services for libraries were cut, and the Library's Cataloging Department and central administration units were reduced. A variety of user fees were also implemented.

The 17.5% cut in County funding may trigger a penalty clause in State Education Law resulting in the loss of an additional \$75,000 in state support for the central library and \$525,000 for the Monroe County Library System. A waiver from the Commissioner of Education will be sought to avoid these cuts.

The Library was able to secure a \$220,000 state grant from Assemblywoman Susan John to restore the bookmobile, but this is a one-year appropriation with no guarantee of continued funding for future years.

It is impossible to fully quantify the impact of all of the cuts to the library. One can say that service to the homebound will be eliminated and not truly understand the impact of its elimination on children or senior citizens who depend on the service. This is only one illustration of the grave impact these cuts have on the citizens of the entire County, not just City residents. It is clear that the Library is reeling, when one considers that the workforce has been reduced by 25% over the past six months due to budget reductions.

Impact on Infrastructure and Environment

Mr. Doyle's press release of August 2, 2002, states that the county's proposed 2003-2008 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) will eliminate "non-essential" projects.

The approved CIP contains no funding for the relocation of the County's boat launch at the Port of Rochester. The City anticipated \$2 million from the County for this project. As the County is fully aware, the boat launch, in its current location, impedes the fast ferry project and development of the port. This decision is yet another example of politically motivated hostility to the fast ferry, a vital economic development engine that will benefit the entire community.

The approved CIP also conflicts with the City's expectations for County-aided arterial improvements. Breaking a long-standing practice of allocating a \$1.5 million per year participation-share in projects deemed to be of high priority to the City, the County now proposes an annual average of \$1.5 million over six years, with no funding in fiscal 2003. Also breaking with past practice, the County, not the City, will determine target arterials. As a result, the City must defer the Norton Street improvement project (Goodman Street to the east City line).

Mr. Doyle's proposed 2003 budget also reduces funding to towns for road maintenance, thus passing the costs to town budgets and deferring maintenance that will end up costing taxpayers more in the long run.

Funding for many important environmental programs is also impacted, including:

- Elimination of the Environmental Management Council, which provides important reference data on site investigation and cleanup projects;
- Elimination of the Water Education Collaborative, a participant in waterway clean-ups;
- Elimination of the Rochester Embayment Remedial Action Plan (a mandated international water protection and remediation plan);
- Elimination of water quality monitoring at Ontario Beach and the Erie Canal and monitoring of West Nile Virus indicators;
- Elimination of funding for all soil and water districts, which acquire grants for projects such as the Oatka Creek Study and the Braddock's Bay Watershed project;
- Elimination of support for the Cornell Cooperative Extension which provides services to 580 local farms which provide \$180 million in annual income to the area, and 320+ horticultural businesses with aggregate annual incomes of more than \$165 million.

These environmental programs use County dollars to leverage more than \$2 million in outside matching funds each year.

The irony of a community with some of the most productive farmland in the world, situated on one of the world's Great Lakes, and with an abundance of water resources such as Irondequoit Bay, the Genesee River, and the Erie Canal, dismantling so many programs that would permit us to capitalize upon these resources would bring a smile if the very real consequences were not so dire.

Impact on Public Safety

Despite Mr. Doyle's public promises to hold public safety harmless, his proposed budget:

- Marks the third straight year of cuts to the 911 Center. The 911 Center will have lost at least nine positions over the past two budget cycles (assuming the best scenario for 2003);
- Reduces funding for probation;
- Reduces funding for the Radio Center;

- Eliminates funding for downtown police services.

Impact on Health-Care Systems

The impact of Mr. Doyle's proposal on the health-care system of this community must be examined closely because in many instances the initial reduction in services or benefits appears small, however, some of the reductions will produce ripple effects throughout the health-care system.

For example, one proposal reduces nursing services contracts for vendors that provide flu shots. Flu shots have been shown to be clinically and economically effective among seniors. These shots reduce hospitalizations among seniors 48-57% and save \$117 per year per person vaccinated.¹⁴

The proposed budget reduces funding for lab testing for tuberculosis and for lead levels in the bloodstream. It eliminates 87 public health positions, in addition to other health-care cuts.

These cutbacks come in areas with critical needs. Childhood asthma, Type 2 diabetes, and lead poisoning are at epidemic levels among City children. The mortality rate of black infants is three times that of white infants in some City neighborhoods. A larger percentage of our Latino population lacks health insurance.

These issues are beyond the capacity of the County to solve in its mandated role as public health provider. But the County can be part of a process to address these issues in partnership with organizations that have the resources and a demonstrated willingness to target these resources for the benefit of the entire community. Project Believe is an example of this type of collaboration.

Project Believe is a major initiative launched by the University of Rochester to target health disparities with a goal of making Rochester the healthiest community in the nation by 2020. As former U.S. Surgeon General and advisor to Project Believe, David Satcher, has written, "Community collaboration and public-private partnerships are key to achieving the Project Believe goal."¹⁵

Monroe County's vision statement in the 2003 budget document also expresses a goal of engaging in "partnerships to improve the health of its community and the environment."

However, Mr. Doyle's proposed cuts contradict the county's vision and may have a disastrous impact on Project Believe and other vital community partnerships.

Future Implications of County Actions

Balancing a public budget is always difficult, exacting work. The allocation of scarce resources frequently calls for unpleasant actions. It requires elected leaders who serve as stewards of the community -- who serve as selfless servants, manage assets without trying to own them, anticipate future trends, and devise great plans that benefit the entire community.

Rather than stewardship, Mr. Doyle has constructed a nasty, supercharged atmosphere around his 2003 budget, making it is difficult to look beyond the immediate pain. It is, however, important to do so, for there are worrisome future implications to his actions.

A further downgrade of the county's credit rating can be expected, followed by a possible downgrade of the City's, followed by downgrades of those of the towns, villages, and independent school districts. Rating agencies and the bond buying community can see beyond the illusion of "stable county property taxes" and discern that the burden is merely downloaded to other municipalities. Therefore, when borrowing is required (and it will be by virtually every municipal entity at some point), the interest charged will be greater.

Ironically, Mr. Doyle's insistence upon "stable" county property taxes threatens to undercut current property values, as the market factors-in diminished community services, amenities, and cooperation. Will the Monroe County extant under the Doyle 2003 budget really be "Made for Living"? It is difficult to see how that will be possible.

Historically, Monroe County holds an envied position. We are the home of creative thinkers and do-ers. We have built industrial and service giants of international renown. We have flourished when others have faltered.

Historically, local government has played a positive and proactive role in our successes. The choices we make for public investment -- what our taxes buy for us -- have helped the market work for us.

Historically, Monroe County residents are interested in practical, constructive approaches to issues and are not interested in the shriller approaches of those who offer simplistic single-issue solutions. Mr. Doyle's budget reflects a myopic vision that Monroe County residents have historically rejected. Starving culture, social services, infrastructure, and the environment only feeds mediocrity.

Mr. Doyle places us on the edge of a dangerous cycle. By dismantling county support for important programs and agreements, he diminishes the effectiveness of all local governments. Unaddressed problems will fester and grow more acute. The fabric of trust, accountability, and cooperation will unravel.

Recommended Strategies for the County Legislature

In the short term, I urge the Monroe County Legislature to enact a modest property tax

increase and to use the revenues generated therefrom to restore some of the threatened services. Given my duties, I would urge that the decidedly anti-City, anti-poor thrust of many of the proposed cuts be reversed. I specifically urge re-examination of the budget and elimination of all cuts that would create unfunded mandates for the City, towns, and villages.

Moreover, given the clear need for a 2003 tax increase, I pledge that I will never partake in or encourage others in partisan political criticism for having supported such a tax increase. I will also encourage the leaders of all political parties to make a similar pledge.

In the longer term, I urge the Legislature to

- ✓ Support a coalition of urban mayors and county executives to lobby the state to reduce and stabilize the fiscal impact of state mandates.
- ✓ Join me and other mayors to lobby the State to restore General Purpose Local Government Revenue Sharing to the statutory formula of eight percent -- a law the State consistently overrides in order to provide localities with far less than the amount required. With equitable revenue sharing, we would be able to hold down, or even reduce, our property taxes.
- ✓ Become active in 2010 Stewardship Council. The Rochester 2010 plan is our only citizen-based regional planning document. It details long-term goals developed by the community. In difficult financial times, it's crucial to set priorities according to what citizens want and will support. We should also examine ways to extend the citizen participation process into suburban communities.
- ✓ Consolidate City and County government. Local taxes are swollen by expensive overlaps among different units of local government. The ongoing fiscal crises of the City and County provide an historic opportunity to examine the configuration of existing resources and modern needs, in order to find better ways to provide local public services.

ENDNOTES

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2. Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency

3. *Rochester Business Journal*, September 6, 2002
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